THE INTERNET AS A DIVERSE COMMUNICATIVE SPHERE? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ACTIVIST WEBSITES IN THE UNITED STATES AND NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract

This research evaluates websites from "non-deviant" and "deviant" activist organizations from New Zealand and the United States to better understand the relationship between the type of advocacy group and the visual imagery used for self-representation. Preliminary findings complicate the notion of a diverse communicative sphere and suggest a strong homogenizing effect could actually be occurring on the internet that devalues distinct, cultural voices. Now that activists face the responsibility of representing themselves to potentially billions of viewers, this research suggests that self-imposed 'normalizing' restrictions on visual constructions of organizational identity may be occuring.

Abstrak

Kajian ini menilai laman sawang organisasi aktivis 'bukan-devian' dan 'devian' di New Zealand dan Amerika Syarikat untuk memahami hubungan antara jenis kumpulan advokasi dan imej visual yang digunakan untuk representasi diri. Dapatan awal kajian menyukarkan tanggapan tentang sfera komunikasi yang pelbagai dan mencadangkan satu kesan kesamaan yang jitu sebenarnya boleh berlaku di Internet yang mengurangkan pandangan budaya. Oleh kerana para aktivis berhadapan dengan tanggungjawab mempresentasi diri kepada berbilion penonton, kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa sekatan pendedahan diri pada gambaran pembentukan identiti organisasi mungkin akan terjadi.

Keywords: Internet, Deviance, activist, websites, cyber-communication.

Introduction

Activist groups have long charged that media misrepresent their purpose or polarize their issues (Barker-Plummer, 1996; Gitlin, 1980, van Zoonen, 1992). Their frustration has stemmed from the deeply

held belief that those who control power within society also create the predominant mass ideology of citizen organizations (Grossberg, Wartella & Whitney, 1998). However, the arrival of the Internet has allowed for organizations to present their own ideology to a truly mass audience — without any mediation — for the first time in history. The Internet has permitted groups to define their own terms "within which reality is experienced, perceived, and interpreted" (Grossberg, et. al., 1998, 183).

In creating their own visual ideology, activist organizations now control the implicit boundaries where particular information is included and excluded for potentially billions of people. Yet, it is possible that with the capability to reach the masses, activist organizations may now have to pay greater attention to the powerful moderate 'mainstream' — the majority of those exposed to their message. While the inception of the Internet has been heralded as an advancement for diversity, democracy and a heterogeneity of voices, the actuality — in terms of self-representation — could be much more of a homogenizing effect. This possibility has deeper implications for groups that deviate further from societal norms around the world.

Therefore, this research explores the generally overlooked intersection between activist organizations and visual constructions of organizational identity on the Internet. Given that the internet is a global technology, this research attempts to compare findings between two democratic countries: the United States and New Zealand. The Internet has been heralded as a democratizing and heterogeneous communication tool, particularly for activist citizen organizations. Yet, a thorough examination of visual content on the Web that substantiates this position has not followed. With remarkably little data exploring this facet of cyber-communication, this research asks whether activist organizations that deviate more from accepted norms in society use equally deviant visual representations to get their message out. This area of overlooked research must be examined if scholars are to better understand the widely assumed democratizing forces of the Internet.

Democracy and Diversity

Activists are defined as "two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion tactics, or force" (Grunig, 1992, 504). Their success depends in large part on their ability to access and to use political allies, media coverage, money, and public awareness (Heath & Nelson, 1984). Activist groups are or begin as, for the most part, marginal or powerless groups (Berry, 1984). Certainly, there are exceptions, such as the National Rifle Association

or the Sierra Club, but the overwhelming majority of activist organizations remain largely powerless in society (Greenwald, 1977). However, because of the inherent capabilities of the Internet, new hope has arisen that activist organizations will be able to gain credibility and power in their struggle for social change.

The Internet has emerged as one of the principle tools that citizen organizations use to recruit activist members and disseminate information. The technology of the Internet has allowed for horizontal and vertical flow of communications (Stromer-Galley, 2000), physical connectivity, data communality, and interactivity (Flanagin et al., 2000). With no central control point (Berman & Weitzner, 1997), the Internet has allowed activists and citizen groups to produce, receive and distribute information almost instantaneously (Bertelson, 1992; Fisher, et al., 1996, Lunenfeld, 1999) from both a visual and textual perspective (Dyson, 1997).

There are several prominent camps of thought that conceptualize an expanded democracy on the Internet. Dahlberg (2001) categorizes these groups as liberal individualists, communitarians and deliberative democratists. While each stresses different modes of an expanded democracy, all believe that the Internet, at its core, benefits the growth of a democratic sphere. Barlow (1997) charges that the Internet holds such promise that it could one day "undo all the authoritarian powers on earth" (4). Other scholars have framed the Internet as space for thriving democracy and plurality (Kellner, 1995; Rosen, 1995; Pavlik, 1996) where activist groups can become more powerful (Coombs, 1998) and individuals can become more civically engaged (Bucy & Gregson, 2001) due to their unique, singular voice (Wiegner, 1994). These arguments rest on a supposition that as Internet users become increasingly exposed to a multiplicity of perspectives, a Habermasian public sphere will develop. The Internet has been called the ultimate democracy (Gunkel & Gunkel, 1997) that has allowed the United States more freedom than it has ever experienced in the past (Rosen, 1995).

Certainly, previous technologies were seen as equally democratic in promise during their inception (Dahlberg, 2001). Yet, it has been argued that what differentiates this medium is that the Internet, unlike other communication technologies, is less centralized, accessible to public intervention and not defined by a one-way or top-down communication model (Kellner, 1995). Researchers have also charged that the Internet allows for greater anonymity and thus a plurality of voices that do not fear the repercussions of racism or sexism.

The sheer abundance of content on the Internet suggests a strong level of diversity. By 1998, web pages topped 150 million (Liberatore, 1998). Estimates of the number of people in the United

States using the Internet between 1995 and 1997 varied between 5.8 million to about 51 million, depending on the source (Hoffman, Kalsbeek, & Novak, 1996, McGarvey, 1996, Taylor, 1997). More recently, the previously high estimate of 51 million was found to double in 2002. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that there were 104 million Internet users in the United States in 2002, which translated to roughly 56 percent of the population (Future Focus, 2002). In 2001, thirty-seven percent of New Zealanders had home access the internet (Statistics New Zealand, 2005). New Zealand now has one of the highest rates of internet access in the world. It was recently ranked eighth in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for number of internet users per 10,000 population (International Telecommunication Union, 2003). Datamonitor (1999) predicted that by 2003 there would be roughly 545 million worldwide Internet users. As more people go 'wired,' the Internet inevitably becomes more diverse. While college educated, highly paid white men inhabited early cyberspace (Gunkel & Gunkel, 1997), U.S. women now slightly outnumber men on the Internet (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2001). Further, minorities and families with modest incomes continue to grow (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2001). Given these increases in diversity, the assumption could be made that there has also been a concomitant increase in diverse visual elements on the Internet.

Design and Deviance

Deviance has emerged as an important conceptual categorization in differentiating citizen organizations (Gitlin, 1980). Admittedly, in their effort to change widespread thinking or alter accepted political policies, citizen groups by their very definition, deviate from the norm. Yet, some groups deviate further from accepted societal values than others. Standards of deviance within social organizations have historically been constructed on loose political grounds. Meaning the further away from moderate centrist views, such as similarity to the majority of Americans and the amount of change advocated, the more deviant the group (Shoemaker, 1984). Extremist groups, conceptually similar to the categorization of deviance, are said to demonstrate dogmatic intolerance, expressed in varying forms, and possess a rigid obedience to an authority that has been shaped by group unity and ideology (Gardner, 1997).

There is some evidence to suggest that more deviant groups have historically represented themselves through direct persuasive imagery that utilizes violence (Ray & Marsh, 2001) or subversive design techniques, such as instability and fragmentation. In doing so, these groups have challenged design techniques and popular aesthetic conceptions. Visual imagery reproduces informational cues

that individuals use to construct their perception of social reality (Messaris, 1994). The impact of these images is reinforced by Gattegno (1969) who found that sight itself is simultaneous, comprehensive and synthetic in its analysis. Indeed, visual images are central to how we represent, make meaning, and communicate in the world around us (Sturken, & Cartwright, 2001, 1).

Research has shown that different techniques and aesthetic approaches signify different meanings to viewers. The overall design of a web page itself can suggest sophistication, seriousness and professionalism if it follows a structured, aligned construction (Williams, 1994). When elements are aligned, there is an invisible line that connects items and indicates their relationship. Without any alignment, a design can appear haphazard and unstructured.

In deconstructing design, experts have generally agreed upon several guides (Lauer & Pentak, 2002) that have implications for deviance: unity, balance, rhythm, and contrast. These widely accepted design techniques, when skillfully used, create cohesiveness, professionalism, serenity and calmness (Williams & Tollett, 2000). When manipulated, these techniques can often translate into disorder, tension, a sense of chaos and division. For example, balanced designs have been found to denote strength (Lauer & Pentak, 2002) whereas an unbalanced design creates uneasiness. However, as Lauer and Pentak (2002) note, both asymmetrical and symmetrical designs are balanced in relation to visual weight. Whereby a symmetric design denotes formality, tradition and conservatism, an asymmetrical design proves to have a dynamic tension (Lauer & Pentak, 2002).

Williams and Tollett (2000) suggest that type on web pages can appear more sophisticated and professionalized if a few simple rules are followed: type must be readable; not in too many colors, not too large, stable in movement and unblinking. Typography that breaks these rules often appears either subversive or elementary. Further, these authors have argued that organization, structure, a navigation menu, and a simple background in a website appear more professional.

Images themselves are profoundly important in creating meaning for the viewer. Messaris (1997) argues that visual images elicit emotions, serve as photographic proof and establish an implicit link between the image itself and some other emotion or thing. More deviant activist groups have historically represented themselves through direct persuasive imagery that utilizes violence or sexualized imagery (Ray & Marsh, 2001) to denote the direct-action orientation of the organization. Symbols have also been widely used by organizations because these visual constructions effectively and succinctly communicate the ideology of that organization to the viewer (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). For example, when symbols

such as an American flag are used, the meanings associated with that flag (patriotism, democracy, capitalism, freedom, etc.) are transferred to that organization in the mind of the viewer. However, when well-known symbols are manipulated in some way, the opposite of the symbols' intended meaning is often conferred upon that group.

In creating imagery for a specific audience, designers have often paid close attention to attracting the interests of their constituency. Kaye and Medoff (2001) point out that "an online site may be perfectly designed from a company's point of view, but if it does not attract users or encourage repeat visits, the site is not worth the time and resources of upkeep" (p. 292). Obviously, the same applies to activist organizations. For the aesthetic of a site to be successful, the design must reflect the content provided and attract the organization's core audience. Yet, the dilemma is that there is not simply one single public that visits a site. Rather, there are several publics who may navigate through an organization's site that are in no way homogeneous (Giussani, 1997). Giussani (1997) writes, "to take into account all of these elements, the wild diversity of the public, the different cultures, the different media tools, and to make something coherent" (4) is the biggest challenge to those uploading content on the web. To reflect this heterogeneity, some scholars have argued that there is a broad range of layout and design diversification on the web (Cordone, 1998), which displays standard Web elements, such as image maps, navigational buttons, animated advertisements, etc. This research examines whether this suggested visual heterogeneity actually applies to all types of activist organizations. Are the most deviant groups on the Internet represented through common, non-confrontational imagery and standard design techniques or do their visual constructions equate with their professed ideologies? Is there any relationship between the type of advocacy group and the visual imagery used for self-representation?

Hypotheses

Given previous research that suggests the Internet is an arena for divergent voices to be seen, the following hypotheses are offered to determine whether deviant organizations use concomitant imagery to represent themselves on the Internet:

H1: Non-deviant activist organizations will be more likely to utilize the skillful design techniques of unity, balance, rhythm and contrast to denote order, cohesiveness, professionalism, serenity, and calmness than deviant activist organizations.

H2: Non-deviant activist organizations will be more likely to incorporate a professional design emphasizing organization,

alignment, a navigation menu, and a simple background than deviant activist organizations.

H3: Non-deviant activist organizations will be more likely to use sophisticated and professional approaches to typography (as evidenced by easy readability, small type sizes, unblinking type, static type and aligned type) than deviant activist organizations.

H4: The visuals of a non-deviant activist organizations' will be less likely to utilize subversive symbolism, or violent, sexualized, confrontational or deviant imagery, than deviant activist organizations.

While practice of logo design dates back to ancient Greece, it has been intrinsically tied to business, and therefore, mainstream, normalized interests. Early logos that used to differentiate mason marks, for example, have become crucial visual identities for any type of business in modern society. The presence of a logo, in and of itself, suggests a connection with mainstream, normalized capitalistic ideologies. Therefore:

H5: Non-deviant activist organizations will be more likely to incorporate a logo into their design than deviant activist organizations.

Given previous research that suggests the Internet is an expanding democratic sphere that encompasses a wide range of diversity, it is suggested that all activist organizations would be best served by conveying a unified textual and visual representation. Rather than concealing the mission of a deviant organization behind innocuous graphics, this research suggests that the Internet allows for transparency in visual communication.

H6: The visual content of non-deviant activist organization web pages and deviant activist organizations web pages will be more likely to communicate textual content than to communicate disjointed visual and textual messages.

Finally, given that use of the internet continues to rapidly expand throughout the world, it is suggested that findings from two specific democracies (the United States and New Zealand) will utilize visual imagery in a similar manner.

H7: Non-deviant activist organizations in New Zealand will visually present themselves on the internet in the same manner as non-deviant organizations in the United States.

Methodology

Content Selection and Coding

In the United States, two hundred mainstream web pages were selected randomly based on inclusion in Guidestar, a database of 850,000 IRS-recognized nonprofit organizations and World Advocacy, publicized as the "world's premier list of advocacy groups." (World Advocacy, 2003). This was done to purposefully gather a spectrum of organizations that are not confined to one political, geographical or ideological location, yet are located in a public index defined by inclusion in the mainstream IRS-recognized database. The remaining 200 web pages were from the American Family Foundation, the Anti-Defamation League and Altervistas. The American Family Foundation (2003) and the Anti-Defamation League (2003), assemble URL's of 'deviant' web citizen organizations, such as neo-nazis, religious cults, militias, Satanists, and racist groups for educational or informational purposes. Altervistas (2003), on the other hand, is a database of any URL's that are "weird and bizarre." Only activist citizen organization web pages were used from the Altervista database.

In New Zealand, mainstream websites were selected from the Te Puna Web Directory, which is a directory to New Zealand and Pacific Island web sites. All organizations listed under "lobby groups" were included. As was the case with the United States, this was done to purposefully gather a spectrum of organizations that are not confined to one political, geographical or ideological location, yet are located in a public index. The result of this search was 66 wesbsites. Unfortunately, at this writing, it was not possible to locate a substantial number of 'deviant' web citizen organizations. Therefore, in comparisons to organizations in the United States, only the 'mainstream' organizations were used.

A randomized content analysis of the front pages of 466 web pages was then completed. Coders were instructed to code only what 'pops up' when the home URL is typed in. If the page automatically goes to a second page without any user intervention, then both pages were coded. Two coders were selected from a graduate program that emphasized visual imagery in mass communication. To ensure that a higher level of validity in determining deviance, coders were asked to stop after coding the first 75 web pages. From these, 15 'very deviant' or 'somewhat deviant' organizations and 15 'not deviant at all' or 'somewhat not deviant' organizations were randomly selected. These thirty web pages were then shown to 100 students in an Introduction to Mass Communication course, who then completed a survey about their conceptions of the organizations' deviance. This was an essential additional step (beyond measuring intercoder reliability for this

variable) due to constantly shifting constructions of deviance. Groups that were at one time deemed deviant have become an integral part of the cultural landscape (Denning, 1997). Students, in particular, were sampled because their age is generally similar to the average age of participators within many activist organizations. Students from the Introduction to Mass Communication course in particular were sampled due to their apparent interest in mass communications (gauged by their enrollment in the course) and their limited amount of knowledge in the subject as evidenced by their enrollment in an introductory course. If there was an acceptable level of similarity between the coders and outside students, the study would be continued. If there was a significant difference, results would be evaluated and appropriate changes made.

Coders were trained in determining design guides such as unity, balance rhythm and contrast as well as symbolism, apparent violence, and sexual content in imagery. Coders were also instructed to classify the design of the web page itself along traditional design classifications of proportion, movement, contrast and unity (Berger, 1989). Finally, students were given training about different typographical treatments in web page design.

Operationalization of Variables

Given the often-subjective nature of visual communication, the following terms were operationalized for the purposes of this study to ensure a higher level of reliability in coding the variables.

> Unity: Determined through proximity, repetition or continuation. These forms of unity can communicate specific ideological, geographical or symbolic cohesiveness to the reader (Lauer & Pentak, 2002). This concept is closely related to the Gestalt theory of visual cognition, which states that through various methods of unification there is a resulting perception that the whole is substantively different than the sum of its parts. For the purposes of this research, if an element was grouped within a pre-determined space with another element, then these elements were said to be unified by proximity. If more than one element was recurring within a specific space then these elements were unified through repetition. Images that were grouped through a visually continuous line or by their directional unanimity were unified through continuation.
>
> Balance: An element frequently used to demonstrate strength and professionalism or isolation and uneasiness (Lauer & Pentak, 2002). Accordingly, these emotions are found in symmetrical balance and asymmetrical balance. Radial balance and crystallographic balance are often used to denote a sense

of overwhelming emotion or chaos. Radial balance was found when all of the elements radiated or circled out from a common central point whereas crystallographic existed when all elements within a web page carry equal emphasis over the whole format. If any obvious usage of balance was found, it was categorized within these four options.

Rhythm: Categorized as either progressive or alternating. Progressive rhythm was detected when elements gradually shifted in shape, color, value or texture within the frame, creating a quiet sense of serenity. Alternating rhythm was present when elements interchanged with one another in a consistent and regulated pattern creating a tenser, dynamic emotion.

Contrast: Occurs when two elements or more are markedly different. The greater the difference, the greater the contrast. Contrast can occur by using differences in size, value, color and type (Lauer & Pentak, 2002). More contrast emphasizes difference and divisiveness while less contrast communicates calmness.

Structure: Arranged elements that mutually connect through parallel or perpendicular alignment.

Organic: Elements that are free form and do not necessarily have perpendicular or parallel alignment with one another.

Navigation menu: A graphical or textual 'map' that guides users through the site and gives users easy access to the pages they want (Barnd & Yu, 2002).

Symbols: A widely accepted sign or object that stands for or represents another thing, often an abstract concept.

Logo: A symbol or letter representing an activist organization.

Deviance: Differing from the norm or from the accepted social and/or moral standards of society.

Confrontational: Challenging or hostile.

Professional: Demonstrating great skill or experience.

Analysis Technique

The study utilized descriptive statistics to describe the variables of interest. Inter-observer reliability coefficients were utilized to provide an indication of the reliability of the coding scheme used. Chi-square correlations, expected values, adjusted residual scores, simple percentages, and frequencies were utilized to answer the stated hypotheses.

Results

In total, there were 22 variables coded for this study to examine the six hypotheses. Through the use of Cohen's kappa measure of agreement, two coders generated a 69.2 percent inter-coder reliability agreement the activist organizations' level of deviance. The first four variables examining unity, balance, rhythm, and contrast in the web page design generated 67.6 percent intercoder reliability. The remaining variables (logo, structure, alignment, navigation menu, background, violent imagery, sexual imagery, apparent symbolism, type readability, type size, blinking type, moving type, alignment of type) generated a much higher .869 intercoder reliability coefficient. The final four variables that gauged the visual elements of the web site front pages as a whole (visuals conveying content, professional design, visuals as confrontational, visuals as deviant) produced a 74.2 percent intercoder reliability. Values of kappa greater than 0.75 indicate excellent agreement beyond chance alone, values between 0.40 to 0.75 indicate fair to good (SPSS, 1999).

In comparing the randomly sampled 15 'very deviant' or 'somewhat deviant' organizations and 15 'not deviant at all' or 'somewhat not deviant' organizations against student conceptualizations of deviance, there was strong uniformity. Out of thirty organizations, 3 had less than 50 percent of respondents agreeing with the coders' categorization of deviance. The remaining 27 were in agreement suggesting a high level of reliability in coding deviance.

Frequencies

Unity through repetition was found to be the overwhelming (65.5 percent) source of unity in design. Only 3.3 percent of the 400 front page web pages were found to have no apparent use of unity, suggesting a strong sense of cohesiveness on web page content. Balance was found to be more equally weighted across values, but the majority of web pages used asymmetrical balance (46.8 percent) followed by no apparent use of balance (29.3 percent), symmetrical balance (21.8 percent) and radial balance (2.3 percent). In accordance with previous research, the preponderance of asymmetrical balance

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denotes a rejection of formality, tradition and conservatism, and a communication of dynamic tension.

The majority of web pages had no apparent use of rhythm in the design (73.5 percent). The most common rhythm technique used was alternating rhythm (23.3 percent). Contrast was rarely used. Eighty five percent of web pages 'did not use contrast' or 'did not use contrast very much.' This suggests there was no striking imagery denoting strong difference in visual web page content. Rather, web pages relied more upon communicating calmness in their opening pages.

In coding what has been determined as 'professionalism' in web site design, pages were found to be 'very' or 'somewhat' structured in a near totality of 93.3 percent of web pages. Similarly, 96.3 percent of web pages were 'very aligned' or 'somewhat aligned.' A very high 82.7 percent of web pages had a navigation menu and only 19.5 percent of activist organizations used a pattern as their background in their website front page. However, when coders were asked directly if the design was professional, results were much more mixed. While still a minority, 11.3 percent of web pages were found to be 'very unprofessional' and 24.5 percent were judged as 'somewhat unprofessional.' Yet, the majority of web pages (64.3 percent) were found to be 'somewhat professional' or 'very professional.'

In further coding of professionalism and sophisticated approaches to design, the overwhelming majority of web pages used a normal type size (89.5 percent), did not use blinking type (84.8 percent), and did not use moving type (90.3 percent). The alignment of type on a web page tended to be mixed (47.3 percent) or was simply left justified (36.0) percent.

When initially examining the web page, coders were asked to ascertain the meanings behind *only* the visual imagery and the design. As much as it is possible, coders were asked to make initial judgments of the page images and design without reading the words first. The majority of web page visual content was found to be 'not confrontational at all' or 'not very confrontational' (86.6 percent). Further 78.5 percent of visual content was found to be 'not deviant at all' or 'not very deviant.' Ninety seven percent of web pages had no violent imagery. A nearly equal 97.5 percent of web pages had no sexual imagery either. Sixty one percent of web pages used no apparent symbolism.

The majority of activist organizations (63.0 percent) used a logo on their front web pages, suggesting a strong linkage to mainstream, corporatized approaches to identity. Finally, 53.8 percent of visuals did not appear to convey the textual content of the site and an additional 24 percent of visual content did not appear to convey the textual content very well. These preliminary results suggest that

visuals may have been used (inadvertently or purposefully) to conceal the meaning and mission of the organization.

These findings, when taken in total, suggest a preponderance of 'normalized', 'mainstream' visual content on activist organizations' web pages. However, further statistical measures were completed to discover any linkages between the measured level of organizational deviance and visual content.

Associations Between Deviance and Visual Content

An association was operationalized as a statistically significant relationship between measured levels of deviance and variables used to gauge visual content. This test was necessary to determine if more deviant organizations were more likely to use certain visual constructions on the Internet.

Significance was measured through three statistical measures: Chi Square p values; large expected values; and strong adjusted residual scores, or the difference between expected and observed counts that demonstrates actual effects of this relationship. Strong effects of a particular case of one variable on a particular case of another variable were found if not more than 20% of the cells have expected values less than 5. Within these cells, adjusted residual scores that depart markedly from the model of independence (well above +2 or below –2) demonstrated added strength in relationships. Hypothesis 1 stated that non-deviant activist organizations will be more likely to utilize the skillful design techniques of unity, balance, rhythm and contrast to denote order, cohesiveness, professionalism, serenity, and calmness than deviant activist organizations. Three of the four variables (unity, balance and rhythm) tested had a statistically significant relationship between deviance level and the variable in question (Table 1). However, three of the four variables (balance, rhythm, and contrast) also produced more than 20% of the cells with expected values less than 5. Therefore, only unity was determined to demonstrate a significant and strong relationship. When adjusted residuals were examined for specific relationships between unity and deviance, the findings were further mitigated. Of the sixteen relationships between deviance ('not deviant at all', 'somewhat not deviant', 'somewhat deviant,' and 'very deviant') and unity ('none apparent,' 'unity through proximity,' 'unity through repetition,' and 'unity through continuation'), six showed strong difference from the model of independence and the remaining ten relationships were found to be weak. Thus, hypothesis 1 was rejected.

The second hypothesis stated that non-deviant activist organizations will be more likely to incorporate a professional design emphasizing organization, alignment, a navigation menu, and a simple background than deviant activist organizations. Two

variables (organization of the page and alignment) were found to show no significant association with deviance. While the navigation menu and background variables did have a significant p value (.023 and .000 respectively), both had over 28% of cells with small expected values, suggesting that these small expected values made large contributions to the size of the Chi-Square statistic. The professional variable was the only one that had a significant p value and an acceptable level of expected values. When examining adjusted residuals for the direction of the relationship, it was found that the most extreme residual (7.6) was for a very professional design used by organizations that were perceived to be not deviant at all. Meaning, if the variables were independent, you would expect many fewer professionally designed web pages from non-deviant organizations. Similarly, it was found that very deviant organizations produced fewer very professional designs than would be expected if all variables were independent. Therefore Hypothesis 2 was partially accepted for overall professionalism in design from non-deviant organizations but rejected when examining specific variables of organization, alignment, a navigation menu, and a simple background.

Hypothesis 3 stated that non-deviant activist organizations will be more likely to use sophisticated and professional approaches to typography (as evidenced by easy readability, small type sizes, unblinking type, static type and aligned type) than deviant activist organizations. In this case, all relationships with significant p values (readable type and alignment of type) produced more than 30% of the cells with expected values less than 5. Thus, the contribution of a few sparse cells unduly inflated the chi-square statistic. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Hypothesis 4 stated that the visuals of a non-deviant activist organizations' will be less likely to utilize subversive symbolism, or violent, sexualized, confrontational or deviant imagery, than deviant activist organizations. The use of violent imagery was found to be not significantly related to deviance. Sexual imagery had a significant p value but produced 66.7 percent of cells with expected values less than 5. The remaining three variables (apparent symbolism, deviant visual imagery, and confrontational imagery) were found to be statistically significant with acceptable expected counts in all cells. When examining adjusted residuals for the direction of the relationship between symbolism and deviance, it was found that the most extreme residual (5.8) was for use of symbolism by very deviant organizations. Meaning, if the variables were independent, you would expect many fewer uses of symbolism by very deviant organizations. Similarly, it was found that organizations identified as not deviant at all used less symbolism (4.5) than would be expected if all variables were independent. Organizations identified

as deviant produced more deviant imagery (12.2) than would be expected while organizations identified as not deviant produced less deviant imagery (12.0) than would be expected if all variables were independent. Similarly, organizations identified as more deviant produced more confrontational imagery (5.3) than would be expected if variables were independent and organizations that were deemed not deviant produced much less confrontational imagery (3.7) than would be expected. Therefore Hypothesis 4 was partially accepted for increased use of symbolism, deviant imagery and confrontational imagery by deviant organizations (and less reliance on these variables by non-deviant organizations). However, hypothesis 4 was partially rejected due to a lack of relationship between violent or sexualized imagery and the level of organizational deviance.

Hypothesis 5 states that non-deviant activist organizations will be more likely to incorporate a logo into their design than deviant activist organizations. This relationship had a p value of .311 and was therefore, rejected. Hypothesis 6 states that the visual content of non-deviant activist organization web pages and deviant activist organizations web pages will be more likely to communicate textual content than to communicate disjointed visual and textual messages. Again, this relationship was found to be insignificant ($p = .167$) and hypothesis 6 was rejected.

Comparisons between New Zealand and The United States

Due to the fact that it was difficult to locate a substantial amount of "deviant" activist organizations in New Zealand on the internet, only mainstream organizations from the United States were compared with mainstream New Zealand sites. From the United States' 'non-deviant' sites, 66 were randomly selected for comparison with New Zealand 'non-deviant' sites.

In all but two cases, there was no significant relationship between the country of origin and the variable tested. Thus, the relationship between country of origin and unity, balance, rhythm, contrast, logo, structure, alignment, navigation menu, background, violent imagery, sexual imagery, apparent symbolism, type readability, type size, blinking type, moving type, visuals conveying content, visuals as confrontational, and visuals as deviant were all found to be insignificant. The only exception to this was the relationship between country of origin and the variables "professionalism" and "alignment of type." However, type alignment ($p = .002$) produced 25% of cells with expected values less than 5, which suggested that the small expected values made large contributions to the size of the chi-square statistic. The professional variable was the only one that had a significant p value ($p = .000$) and an acceptable level of expected values (0%). When examining adjusted residuals for the direction of the relationship, it was found

that the most extreme residual (10.3) was for a very professional design from the United States. Meaning, if the variables were independent, you would expect many fewer professionally designed web pages from the United States. Similarly, it was found that New Zealand produced fewer very professional designs than would be expected if all variables were independent. However, this was for only one variable from all 22 tested, so Hypothesis 7, which stated that non-deviant activist organizations in New Zealand will visually present themselves on the internet in the same manner as non-deviant organizations in the United States, was supported.

Discussion

Since 1989, when Tim Berners-Lee first proposed a global hypertext project, later to be known as the World Wide Web, design on the Internet has become progressively more refined. Early information on the web was purely academic without any aesthetic sophistication (Veen, 2001). As the medium gained notoriety and attention through the nineties, design increasingly attempted to make elements more 'user-friendly' by directly reflecting a user's experience (Cordone, 1998). Animated buttons, switches and levers were added to reflect real-world cues; the organization of magazines and books was implemented and navigational tools moved to the left of the screen to reflect the reading style of Western cultures. Still later in the design evolution, movement was added to the functionality of a site. Suddenly, buttons that were pressed for navigation actually appeared pressed. Static sites also began to allow for much more movement. Image maps became more commonplace and the use of fonts expanded through the Internet for a more sophisticated look. Yet, these broad developments in the visual construction of the Internet have always allowed for individual difference and self-expression. However, the findings of this research complicate the notion of a diverse communicative sphere – at least in terms of visual constructions of identity for activist organizations. There has been limited research into how the Internet has pragmatically changed communication (Grossman, 1995) but none as it pertains to the representation of activist organizations — an essential component within the 'democratized' World Wide Web. Further, there is almost no data that deconstructs visual communication on the Web. The general finding of this research is that there is not a strong difference between how deviant and non-deviant organizations represent themselves visually on the Internet. Of the six hypotheses searching for difference between non-deviant and deviant organizations in visual representation, four were rejected outright and two were partially rejected. The strongest findings suggest that the more 'normalized' activist organizations do

present themselves more professionally on the Internet, with little to no symbolism, deviant imagery or confrontational visuals.

TABLE 1

Associations (Deviance x ...)	P value	% Expected Less than 5
Hypothesis 1		
Unity in Design	.000	18.8
Balance in Design	.001	25
Rhythm in Design	.046	25
Contrast in Design	.433	25
Hypothesis 2		
Organization of Page	.069	55
Alignment of Elements	.243	50
Navigation Menu	.023	28.6
Background	.000	29.2
Professional Page	.000	6.3
Hypothesis 3		
Readable Type	.016	62.5
Type Size	.057	33.3
Blinking Type	.390	0
Moving Type	.426	12.5
Alignment of Type	.000	30
Hypothesis 4		
Confrontational Page	.000	18.8
Deviant Page	.000	6.3
Violent Imagery	.637	66.7
Sexual Imagery	.003	66.7
Apparent Symbolism	.000	0
Hypothesis 5		
Logo	.311	0
Hypothesis 6		
Visuals Convey Content	.167	12.5

Yet, the remaining 17 variables found no difference between non-deviant and deviant organizations in visual constructions of identity on the Internet. Further, there was virtually no difference between non-deviant organizations in New Zealand and the United States. This could suggest a strong homogenizing effect is occurring across all activist organizations, regardless of societal deviance — a

possibility that runs counter to the perception that the Internet is a diverse, heterogeneous arena of communication. If visual content is indeed compressing, alternative voices may be facing increased self-imposed restrictions on visual constructions of organizational identity around the globe. This shift may be inevitable given the pressure to appeal to billions of 'moderate' mainstream viewers on the Internet who may stumble upon an activist site through a myriad of different paths.

The effects of this compression are purely anecdotal at this writing, but it stands to reason that a homogenization of information does not create any visual distinction to the viewer about the type of informational content. Thus, viewers – particularly children and the elderly – may be more susceptible to deviant organizations that visually present themselves as moderate in order to have broader appeal. Future research should examine this relationship between perceptions of organizational deviance and visual representation.

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